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ABSTRACT

Predictions for a "third wave" in which power and productivity will be based on developing and distributing information should interest public relations practitioners and educators since public relations will be a critically needed professional specialization. A future of communication technology barely fathomable today, together with a resultant need for multicultural/international understanding among diverse peoples who will readily exploit this ability to communicate with each other, is envisioned. A public relations practitioner must be a highly educated human being, with a strong sense of history and current events, who is taught to think and to solve problems in a certain way. Furthermore tomorrow, the practitioner increasingly will need to be culturally astute and cosmopolitan and particularly sensitive to the multicultural and international nuances of the organization's publics. The practitioner's role will change fundamentally as institutions and society change. Consideration of Cold War dichotomies, such as capitalism vs. communism or democracy vs. totalitarianism, will become old-fashioned or irrelevant for those practitioners called upon to defend and ultimately examine base ideological assumptions of their organizations and their very societies. For future practice, public relations scholars and practitioners will need to consider, not only theories of communication, but also theories of society that satisfactorily transcend more narrow political ideologies. Students need to become professionals who can examine, maintain and modify as necessary the traditional organizational and societal values and belief systems in an age in which those values, beliefs, and ideologies will be continually challenged. (Contains nine notes.) (NKA)

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SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

"Integrating Multicultural/International Experiences Into the Public Relations Curriculum"

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In the Era of Globalization

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"Integrating Multicultural/International Experiences Into the Public Relations Curriculum"

Introduction:

As we approach the Millennium, there has been no dearth of futurists' prophesies predicting massive changes for world society. Such soothsayers' prognoses may vary minutely in their scenarios, but only the most obtuse among the world's citizenry would deny tremendous changes are occurring that most certainly will continue exponentially.

Most of these changes revolve around and are centered upon information and how it is communicated through time and space. Throughout the First World and increasingly throughout the Second and Third Worlds, one cannot drive through a metropolis or upon a remote trunk highway without spotting a motorist busily chatting away on a cellular phone, and an evening meal at a fine restaurant will certainly be interrupted by the ring of such instrument in a neighboring diner's coat pocket.

Although use of facsimile communication will likely continue in the near future, people at work and play increasingly are demanding the faster and more convenient electronic mail communication on the Internet; indeed, such communiqués often are retrieved by harried executives through modems connected to hotel pay phones. For voluminous information, CD-ROMs are the repositories of choice (You can stuff the equivalent of a set of encyclopedia into a corner of your briefcase.), and the era of interactive television--with seemingly infinite applications--will soon be upon us.

The speed of these communication media through time and space has been accelerated to an instantaneous, perhaps insane, level in the lives of contemporary peoples everywhere. Liken this contemporary lifestyle to driving down a busy urban street. Not that long ago, this metaphorical drive would have been made at a comfortable 30 miles per hour. There would have been sufficient time available for the cautious motorist to drive carefully and accurately in deliberate response to feedback, i.e., she could accelerate and steer and brake with unerring precision, arriving safely (and predictably) at her destination. Today, life is more like taking that same drive down a crowded avenue at 90 miles per hour. Response to feedback must be made far more quickly than many people may be able to "drive" comfortably and safely.

This analogy is not far-fetched; it is likely there will be carnage along the information superhighway--and these casualties may be us! But, be that as it may, the future is now, and we must predict its impact so that we can attempt to cope with these changes driven by communication technology.

Public Relations Journal did just that in its October 1995 issue devoted to, "Industry Report Forecast 2001." This special issue is replete with a review of the book, *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*, by Alvin and Heidi Toffler. This volume predicts a "Third Wave" (preceded by agriculture and the Industrial Revolution) in which power and productivity will be based on developing and distributing information.[1] Throughout that issue of *Public Relations Journal*, a common theme postulates that such changes will ultimately benefit public relations as a critically needed professional specialization. In that same issue, Kruckeberg goes so far as to call the next 100 years "the century of public relations."[2]

Despite predictions that may vary in their minutia, the augurs[3] universally point to a future of communication technology barely fathomable to us today, together with a resultant (and increasingly obvious) need for multicultural/international understanding among diverse peoples who will readily exploit this ability to communicate with one another. Furthermore, multicultural understanding is needed, not only to communicate with those from other lands, but also with peoples different from us within our own geographic locales. Kruckeberg observes with considerable understatement that:

> ... *(E)xisting* relationships are being strained, and virtually everyone is being forced into *new* relationships within social systems that are becoming both increasingly diverse and correspondingly divisive.[4]

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[1] "Third Wave to Benefit Public Relations Field," *Public Relations Journal* 51 (October 1995): 44-45.

[2] "1995 Outstanding Educator Award: Preparing for the Century of Public Relations," Ibid., 10-11.

[3] An interesting publication for those wanting exposure to a range of predictions is *The Futurist*. Also of interest to futurist aficionados is the publication, *Society*.

[4] Dean Kruckeberg, "Public Relations as Ideology," Paper presented at the annual convention of the Eastern Communication Association, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 27-30 April 1995.

What Will Public Relations Practitioners Need to Know?

Educators are rightly pondering how to prepare their students, not only for these mind-boggling technological advances, but also for a concomitant world society in which technology makes no promise that heterogeneous peoples will become harmoniously homogenous or at peace with one another.

However, this essentially begs a larger question: What will public relations practitioners need to know in the future that educators can teach their students today? Public relations as a professional specialization will most certainly increase in importance, just as *Public Relations Journal* predicts. However, this more lofty role will only be attainable to practitioners who can rise to the occasion, i.e., 1) who are taught well by public relations educators and 2) who will commit themselves to lifelong education.

What will public relations practitioners need to know in the future? A trite and dismissive answer is "everything," but such unrealistic demand for infinite knowledge is not helpful to educators planning curricula nor to students prioritizing their learning. The 1987 Commission on Undergraduate Education argued:

> The fundamental purpose of undergraduate public relations education is to provide the student with a well-rounded program of study, including an area of specialization called a public relations major. The traditional arts and sciences remain the solid basis for undergraduate education of public relations students, essential to their functioning professionally in a complex society.[5]

Certainly in spirit, and by-and-large in its specific recommendations, the 1987 Commission report is analogous to and compatible with the September 1990 Gold Paper No. 7 of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) entitled, *Public Relations Education--Recommendations and Standards.* Metaphorically describing its curricular recommendations as three concentric circles, IPRA said the smallest circle encloses subjects narrowly concerned with public relations practice, with the second-largest circle containing subject matter in the general field of communication.

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[5]Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education, *The Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education* (Chicago: Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education, 1987), p. 4.

The all-encompassing outer circle represents general liberal arts and humanities education that IPRA deems essential for a successful professional career.[6]

Such criteria essentially can be reduced to the metaphor of a soup bowl, wide but not excessively deep, of general knowledge, with a tall straw sticking up on end representing in-depth knowledge of public relations theory and technique, together with one or more other straws, not as tall, symbolizing knowledge of a particular industry in which a practitioner might invest her career. Essentially, a public relations practitioner must be a highly educated human being, with a strong sense of history and current events, who is taught to think in a certain way and to solve problems in a certain way. Furthermore tomorrow, the public relations practitioner increasingly will need to be culturally astute and cosmopolitan and particularly sensitive to the multicultural and international nuances of her organization's publics.

However, stock advice in achieving this sensitivity easily becomes pedestrian, e.g., platitudinous recommendations to learn a second or third language, to study diverse protocols, to augment international knowledge through frequent world travel and to make friends and acquaintances from other cultures and countries. These efforts, while necessary, are hardly sufficient; they will not begin to address the needs of future public relations practitioners who will be called upon to assume a far more demanding role in their organizations and for world society.

The Role of the Practitioner Will Change Fundamentally:
Rather, the role of the public relations practitioner will change fundamentally as institutions and society change in the "Third Wave" new civilization. Increasingly, organizations will need "keepers" and reconcilers of their values and belief systems. Those professionals will be critically needed who can examine, maintain and modify as necessary traditional organizational and societal values and beliefs that will be challenged in a McLuhanesque "Global Village" in which said values and belief systems of peoples throughout the world will ideologically confront one another.

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[6]International Public Relations Association Education and Research Committee and International Public Relations Association International Commission on Public Relations Education, *Public Relations Education--Recommendations and Standards*, Gold Paper No. 7, (September 1990), p. 2.

Most certainly throughout the world, culturally and geographically bound traditional values and belief systems will be challenged and tested repeatedly on all fronts. Consideration of "Cold War" dichotomies, such as capitalism vs. communism or democracy vs. totalitarian forms of government, will become passé to those practitioners who will be called upon to defend and ultimately examine base ideological assumptions of their organizations and their very societies.

Public relations practitioners--if they prepare themselves well--will be called upon to be corporate, i.e., organizational, interpreters and ethicists and social policy-makers in this complex new world, charged with guiding organizational behavior as well as influencing and reconciling public perceptions.

Practitioners Must be Mindful about Their Own Values:
To perform this function that will become critical in the future, public relations practitioners must be mindful and articulate about their own values and belief systems--and at a level far beyond a broad-based acceptance and defense of Judeo-Christian values and traditional Western concepts about freedom and flow of information. Hardt's mandate for a requisite theory of society for the meaningful study of mass communication is equally apropos for the consideration of the role and function of public relations:

> ... (T)he study of mass communication can make sense only in the context of a theory of society; thus, questions of freedom and control of expression, of private and public spheres of communication, and of a democratic system of mass communication must be raised as part of an attempt to define the position of individuals in contemporary industrialized Western societies.[7]

For future practice, public relations scholars and practitioners will need to consider, not only theories of communication, but also theories of society that satisfactorily transcend more narrow political ideologies. There must be recognition among public relations scholars and practitioners--as well as by society at large--that public relations not only can represent ideologies.

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[7] Hanno Hardt, *Social Theories of the Press* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979), 35.

Rather, in its symmetrical models, public relations practice, itself, is highly value-laden and ideological with a system of professional beliefs. Grunig and White allude to such ideology when they suggest, in their description of "ethical" organizations that build symmetrical, mutually beneficial relationships:

> ... (A)n excellent worldview for public relations ... should be *ethical* in that it helps organizations build caring--even loving--*relationships* with other individuals and groups they affect in a society or the world.[8]

Ideologically, public relations has been historically identified with democracy and with capitalism. There is considerable rationale to appreciate linkages with the former, but one must argue the latter association is unduly restrictive. Sriramesh and White provide tacit endorsement for a *democratic* culture and government in their proposition stating:

> Societal cultures that display lower levels of power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism, but have higher levels of interpersonal trust among workers, are most likely to develop ... excellent public relations practices....[9]

Public relations (particularly in the First World) is commonly practiced by profit-making organizations in capitalistic economic systems; however, nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in noncapitalistic economic systems within nations having democratically oriented cultures and governments.

Rather, it could be argued, it is the historic affinity between democracy and capitalism that fosters the greater use of public relations practice in capitalistic economic systems. Furthermore, one could submit the corollary proposition that symmetrical practice of public relations inevitably will encourage nondemocratic nations to become more democratic.

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[8]James E. Grunig and Jon White, "The Effect of Worldviews on Public Relations Theory and Practice," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 38.

[9] K. Sriramesh and Jon White, "Societal Culture and Public Relations," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 611

However, to be useful in public relations theory-building and model development, deliberation of ideology in public relations should extend far beyond base consideration of governmental and economic systems--up to and including a theory of society.

Just as public relations practitioners will be called upon to examine, maintain and modify as necessary traditional organizational and societal values and beliefs, they will need to do this for themselves as a professional community--examining, defining and articulating their values, belief systems and ideology.

The Challenge to Educators:

Assuredly, the challenge to public relations educators in preparing students for practice in the future must include the more obvious means to integrate multicultural/international experiences into the public relations curriculum.

However, to help students become sensitive, cosmopolitan and culturally astute practitioners, far more must be done for students than exposing them to cultures and nations other than their own.

In addition, students must be prepared to become "keepers" and reconcilers of values and belief systems and corresponding ideologies for their organizations and for their society and must be given the knowledge to assume this role. Professionals will be critically needed who can examine, maintain and modify as necessary traditional organizational and societal values and belief systems in an age in which these values, beliefs and ideologies will be continually challenged.

Furthermore, as they perform this vital role, tomorrow's practitioners must accept the responsibility to define themselves as professionals through an examination and articulation of their own values, belief systems and ideology as a professional community.